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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR IRAN COLLECTIVE

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED ADDRESSEE AND SLUG LINE)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [UN](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: Iran Poised to Chair 2010 Session of the UN Commission on
Narcotic Drugs

REF: 2008 UNVIE 401

Summary

¶1. (U) This is an action request for IO, INR and NEA, see Para 13.

¶2. (SBU) The chairmanship of the 2010 UN Commission on Narcotic
Drugs (CND) will rotate to the Asia Group. Iran has announced to
the Group its intention to pursue the position. If no other Asian
country seeks the chairmanship, Iran plans to announce its candidacy
at the 2009 CND in March 16-20, and will likely receive endorsement
by the Group. If another Asian candidate emerges, the Asia Group
will probably delay making a decision until the Reconvened
Commission to take place December 1-2, 2009. Based on precedents
and performance, Iran is expected to succeed in its quest. Mission
requests Washington guidance for these two scenarios, especially
given the short fuse for the March CND. End Summary.

Iran Announces its Intention

¶3. (SBU) The chairmanship of the CND rotates among regional groups,
and it will be the turn for the Asia Group for the 2010 CND.
Generally the reconvened CND session, which takes place at the end
of a year, makes the decision on the chair of the next CND. The
handover takes place at the end of this reconvened session, and the
new chair serves a one-year term. Missionoff confirmed with two
Asian delegations that in a meeting of the CND Asia Group on
February 24, Iran, as expected, announced its intention to pursue
aggressively the chairmanship of the 2010 CND. Pakistan was the
lone country which endorsed Iran's candidacy at that meeting.
Although Thailand has unofficially expressed interest in the Chair,
many Asian countries believe the Chair is Iran's for the taking.

Arguing Precedent

¶4. (SBU) In announcing Iran's candidacy to the Asia Group on
February 24, Iranian Ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Ali Asghar
Soltanieh, said that he would run on the strength of his record as a
CND vice-chair, as well as past precedent. (Note: The CND bureau
comprises the chair and vice chairs from each regional group. End
Note.) In 2006 Pakistan served as the Asia Group vice-chair for the
UN Commission on Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention and Criminal
Justice (CCPCJ). When the CCPCJ chair rotated to the Asia Group,
Pakistan argued for its candidacy for chairman, based on its
previous vice chairmanship. South Korea, which was the other
candidate, eventually withdrew. Pakistan won endorsement by the

Group. Now, Iran is advancing the same argument. Our Asian interlocutors believe that this argument will carry a lot of weight with the Group.

More Precedent

15. (SBU) On February 25, Namibia Counselor told us that for the CND, the next chairmanship always goes to the current bureau representative of the regional group which gets the rotation. (Note: Namibia is the current chair representing the African Group. End Note.) Since Iran is the current Asia Group representative on the bureau, he expects Iran to become the next CND chairman.

Campaigning on Performance

16. (SBU) According to our interlocutors, Soltanieh is also touting his record as a CND vice-chair through the negotiations on the Action Plan/Annex document for the 10-year review of the 1998 the UNGA Special Session (UNGASS) resolution to combat drugs. Soltanieh believes his leadership was well received, constructive and strong, and will urge Asia Group support based on that performance.

17. (SBU) Mission concurs with this positive assessment on Soltanieh's part. In contrast to his role at the IAEA, where he has been increasingly strident and unhelpful, Soltanieh, as chair of the negotiating sessions on the UNGASS Action Plan, was willing to use his authority to cut off circular interventions from any delegation, insisting that objections to existing language should be accompanied by proposed alternatives. When appropriate, he adjourned formal negotiations for "informal-informal" consultations (i.e., candid discussions off the conference room floor), during which he pushed all parties to come to agreement. As a result, he was able to finalize 211 paragraphs of the 215-paragraph action plan document. (Note: The unresolved four paragraphs touch on "harm reduction",

where Iran and the U.S. are in a similar position, opposing the more extreme EU states. End Note.) He also brokered a "gentleman's agreement" between the U.S. and Canada on the one side, and Iran and Cuba on the other, to include reference to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in the action plan document, a critical issue for the U.S. and Canada, but bitterly opposed by the other two countries.

On Drug Control

18. (SBU) Missionoffs have observed that Iran shares much common ground with the U.S. on drug control. Our contacts at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have touted Iran's diligent efforts to fight drugs, among which are what they describe as impressive efforts to control the border with Afghanistan, and the use of religion in treating addicts (Reftel). In UNODC fora, Iran has spoken of the lives lost in enforcing drug laws. In the course of the UNGASS negotiations since November, the Iranian delegation approached us several times to offer language suggestions that it deemed helpful to the USG position. During informal-informal consultations on February 24 on two contentious paragraphs touching on "harm reduction" in the UNGASS Political Declaration, the Iranian representative announced that its Permanent Mission has received instructions from the President's office to oppose the term both in the political declaration and the action plan. This very strong position also aids USDEL and other delegations opposed to the term.

Thailand Interested, but Faces Uphill Battle

19. (SBU) Our Asian interlocutors told us that although Thailand has not yet announced a formal candidacy, it is interested in becoming the chair. Philippines and other countries are encouraging Thailand to run, if for no other reason than to allow a delay in a formal decision. (Note: If no country opposes Iran, Missionoff has been told that Iran will announce its candidacy at the March 2009 CND,

and the Asia Group in all likelihood will give Iran its endorsement. However, if another Asian country formally submits its candidacy, the Group will have a reason to delay its decision to the Reconvened CND due to take place December 1-2. End note.) In the view of these interlocutors, Thailand faces an uphill battle. The CCPCJ and CND precedents, coupled with Iran's aggressive campaign, its active participation as a delegation and effective leadership as vice-chair, all stack the deck against a Thai victory.

Comment and Action Requested

¶10. (SBU) Mission was impressed by Soltanieh's vigor during his chairmanship of the UNGASS negotiations, as well as his largely fair-minded and results-oriented approach. However, Mission is aware of an apparent Iranian campaign to assume leadership positions across the UN. We are concerned about the prospect of Iran dominating a variety of UN fora in Vienna. Iranian chairmanship of the CND, albeit for one year, could compound Iran's disruptive influence in other Vienna agencies -- sharpest in the IAEA. On the other hand, given Iran's self interest in fighting drugs, Iran may use the CND chairmanship to surprise us on how it could be cooperative in areas in which we have common goals.

¶11. (SBU) If Washington decides to engage Iran, the CND in Vienna may be a place to start. We can refer to Iran by name in our interventions from the floor, if it shares/supports a USG position. We can also have bilateral discussions with Iran on issues of common interest during the CND. If Iran announces its candidacy for the CND chairmanship in the plenary session during the March 16-20 period, and if its candidacy receives Asia Group endorsement, USDEL could openly congratulate Iran from the plenary floor. A further step could be expression of our willingness to work with the new chair on drug control issues important to our two countries and/or to all member states. This can be followed by consultations in both a bilateral and multilateral context in the months leading to the December reconvened session.

¶12. (SBU) The CND will be preceded by a high-level segment on March 11-13. We have learned that the Iranian delegation of 15 will be led by General Moghadam, head of the National Drug Control Headquarters, and will include the head of Iran's narcotics police force, as well as several directors general from relevant ministries. Thus another step USDEL could take is to meet with the Iranian delegation on a technical level, which is something that could happen quite naturally in the course of negotiating resolutions.

¶13. (SBU) Action Requested: Mission requests Washington guidance on how we should react to the Iranian candidacy, if it is announced at

the March CND, and in particular, if Iran emerges as the lone candidate endorsed by the Asia Group. Mission also seeks Washington guidance on whether we should encourage a rival candidacy. Absent further guidance, Mission will stick to its standard position on such matters that selection is up to the concerned regional Group. End Comment and Action Requested.

SCHULTE